Amendments to the Specification:

Please amend the paragraph beginning on line 9 of page 8 as follows:

The sequences encoding the open reading frame of the ectodomain of the Env protein (gp140) from the HIV-1_{US4} strain were codon-optimized as described elsewehere [Haas, 1996 #362; zur Megede, 2000 #1451], and constructed synthetically as a 2.1 kb EcoR1-Xba1 DNA fragment (Midland Reagent Company, Midland, TX). This gene cassette contained the protein-encoding region of the Env protein fused in frame to the human tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) signal sequence as previously described [Chapman, 1991 #1550]. In order to stabilize the oligomeric structure of the encoded gp140 protein, the DNA sequence was mutated to introduce an arginine to serine change in the primary protease cleavage site (REKR) (SEQ. ID NO. 1) in the Env polypeptide ~~[Earl, 1990 #2906] (Fig. 1A)~~. The resulting Env expression cassette (gp140) was cloned into the EcoR1-Xba1 sites of the pCMV3 expression vector for the derivation of stable CHO cell lines. This vector contains the CMV enhancer/promoter elements, an ampicillin resistance gene, and sequences encoding a fusion protein composed of dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR) and an attenuated neomycin resistance protein.